

G. Ruzitska: Adagio and Rondo concertant for cello and orchestra

Zsombor LÁZÁR¹, Ignác-Csaba FILIP²

Abstract: *A young music teacher from Vienna, G. Ruzitska, arrives in Transylvania in 1810. Years later, he settles in Cluj, and becomes deeply involved in the city's music life. As a teacher, instrumentalist, and composer, he becomes established as one of Transylvania's most important musicians. His compositions reflect characteristics of the transitional period between the classic and romantic eras. The Adagio and Rondo concertant for cello and orchestra is one of his least-known, unpublished compositions, and yet, one of the only cello solos of its caliber in the history of the region. The following article provides a technical, historical analysis of the work, from the perspective of the West European cello compositional precedent.*

Keywords: *cello music, Transylvania, G. Ruzitska*

1. Introduction

The Adagio and Rondo concertant for Cello and Orchestra remained on the shelves for 150 years. Acknowledged by István Lakatos (1895 – 1989), the life and work of Georg Ruzitska garnered interest only in recent decades, despite his critical role in the foundation of the first Transylvanian Conservatory, and reputation as a composer in Cluj. This specific composition is mentioned in records, but has not likely been published yet, nor played recently. Its unique “transitional” style and nationalistic aspects warrant a deeper examination in the endeavor to explore Ruzitska's compositional relevance.

¹ Transilvania University Braşov, lazarzsombor@gmail.com

² Transilvania University Braşov, f_ignac@untibv.ro

2. Discussion

2.1. G. Ruzitska

In eighteenth and nineteenth century Transylvania, numerous foreign musicians worked for the church or the aristocracy. They arrive from different places and nations, but mostly for one reason: for a better life. Transylvania being peripheral to the Habsburg empire - and, technically, Europe - offered these individuals the opportunity to live under better financial circumstances (Farkas 2001, 3).

Georg or György Ruzitska was born, 10 February 1786 in Vienna - the fourth child of Czech Wenzel Ruzitska. It is known that as above mentioned there is a kind of migration of musicians in the eighteenth and nineteenth century where aside the Italian, German, Austrian musicians we find also Czech ones who travels to musical centers for better luck. Of the latter group, Ruzitska's father lived in Vienna as the only english horn player of his time (Lakatos 1940, 13).

Before we go deeper into the history we should stand for a moment to clarify the correct spelling of our person's name. There are different versions he uses in his manuscripts (Potyó 2012, 162) and also others used by musicologists, as such we encounter the followings: George Ružitska, G. Ružička, G, Ruzitska, Georgio Ruzitska, György Ruzitska and György Ruzicska. It can be observed in these versions we find forms completely fitting to the Czech and Hungarian orthography but also transitions between these. We can call this as a certain evolution that could be explained with historical events and the context he lived in. Just to mention one event that had great impression on mentality about nationalism is the 1848 Hungarian Revolution.

To continue our dispute about Georg Ruzitska's life we are lucky to have a primary source we can research, the „Sketches of my life” a memoir written by himself in German though published by the musicologist István Lakatos with the title of „Confessions of a Transylvanian Musician, György Ruzitska's memoirs for 1856” in Hungarian. This book gives us details about his early years in Vienna, as well as his first years in Transylvania. From this book we find out that he starts to learn music already in his early young years, first as being a discant singer in different churches then later as a piano and organ student. Among his teachers we can mention the piano teacher Wenzel Müller and Joseph Gelinek the generalbass and composition teacher. In the memoirs he recalls this time by mentioning how important was to hear great masters as Joseph Haydn, Franz Kommer, Joseph Perindl serving at the churches visited by him. After such teachers and a fairly good tuition he looks for a stable duty, position but with no luck. In 1810 comes the turn

in his life when reads in a newspaper that Count János Bánffy wants to hire a music teacher for his daughters. The work is promising since it means a honorary of 600 Forints per year, that was a rather well-paid job in the time. He goes to the audition where he is chosen from three candidates by Philip Caudella composer and choirmaster, another musician we find later in Transylvania. In such ways travels the young Georg Ruzitksa to his new home in the spring of 1810 (Lakatos 1940, 13 - 29).

His first workplace is the Bánffy castle from Szilágynagyfalu (today Nuşfalău in Sălaj county) where beside his main occupation, the teaching, he is improving his piano skills - practices a great amount of time - as well as his language skills, he learns about the country, the social life, he is getting to know the aristocracy of the time and most important from our perspective, he learns to play the cello. These are such resources that he can utilize in his later life in Cluj.

In 1819, when both of his students married, he moved into what was the capital of Transylvania, Kolozsvár, Klausenburg, or Cluj. We do not know much about his life between 1819 and 1835 only that he got married with Antonia Fuchs already in the year when he moved into Cluj and he bought a house in the center of the city. About his occupancy in this period there are mostly conjectures that he would teach and give piano lessons to the well-off bourgeois, although there are also assumptions that he would have been playing role around the music school of Cluj, though certainty of this we find only in the year 1835 when he becomes the schoolmaster of the *Kolozsvári Muzsikai Conservatorium*, the Musical Conservatory of Cluj, a title that he keeps until his death in 1869 (Sófalvi 2017, 109) Earning this title means that he was highly esteemed by the musician – and not only – society, it is known that he had good relations with the important persons of the time just as Ferenc Erkel, the Hungarian opera composer who also composed the national anthem and who worked for a while in Cluj or Sámuel Brassai the great polyhistor with whom he had a strong friendship but we can mention also Philip Caudella who already we know from his earlier life and who had lived for a short period also at Cluj. Ruzitska slowly becomes the center figure of the musical life: organizes public symphonic concerts that are visited by all layers of the society, holds musical evening where play together the leader musicians. Under his leadership the Conservatory achieves the West European standards, he uses the pedagogical material just those that are used in the Paris Conservatoire, though he also adds his own pedagogical works to the syllabus: his Songbook is about the earliest Hungarian singing method. He also serves for a while as cantor of the Piarist Church, so keeping his love towards the organ (Lakatos 1939, 10)

Aside this multi-lateral activity Ruzitska composes too. Most of his work remains in manuscript being published only a few of them. Among his compositions we find an opera – Alonso -, orchestral works – two Fantasy for orchestra and a symphony -, chamber music – four string quartets and three string quintets, several variations for different instruments, sonatas - and a great number of church music – five masses and a requiem that seems to be the most played composition of his (Lakatos 1939, 11). His works today can be found partly in the library of the Gheorghe Dima Conservatory, Cluj as well as in the local Academic Library though most of the legacy was taken to the National Széchényi Library of Hungary in 1911.

2.2. The work

For cello, Ruzitska composed only a few works: Variations with Introduction and Finale, op. 7 from 1816; Introduction and Variations to a Hungarian melody op. 14, Duetto for two celli from 1864 and more than likely from the same year the Adagio and Rondo Concertante. His relationship to this instrument dates back to 1814, when a string quartet is about to be founded, but the cello player is a problematic one. Ruzitska describes the situation in the following way: „...These gentlemen would have been founded a string quartet society if the cello player`s (instrumental) skills would have approached the other players` preparedness. A music teacher a with the name Pöschl was the violoncellist, who was teaching in earl Sámuel Kemény`s house. This musician was a weak, sickly man who could be just rarely convinced for playing. This compelled me to start learning to play the cello.” He purchases an instrument built by the luthier Rheaczek in Vienna and takes a few lessons from the former solo cellist of the Opera Orchestra, Breitenwald, and mentions that he would practice for 2-3 hours per day. With such diligence he achieves a level that allows him to play in the string quartet (Lakatos 1940, 38 - 39). Another link to the cello is his son, who as we know was a fairly good player of the instrument. Here we must mention Brassai Sámuel too, whose cello was discovered only a couple years back that is played today by the principle cellist of the Hungarian Opera at Cluj, Előd Kostyák. We do not know what the relation is between this cello and Georg Ruzitska. He might have taught the famous polyhistor to this instrument? We do not know, there is more work to find out. But what we know certainly is that Béla, Georg`s son was playing numerous times in Brassai`s house with his quartet (Zsizsmann 2018).

Our subject, the Adagio and Rondo Concertante for cello with orchestra accompaniment also leads to Béla Ruzitska, since the work was composed for him

together with the Duetto. Today the manuscript of this composition is kept in in the National Széchényi Library under the register number of OSZK, MsMus 244. Although the already mentioned musicologist, István Lakatos describes this work (and also the Variations op.7 and 14) to have only piano accompaniment (Lakatos 1939, 10, 13), surprisingly when the digitized versions of the manuscripts (of the Variations with Introduction and Finale, op. 7 from 1816 and the Adagio and Rondo Concertante) arrived to me, turned out that these works are composed with orchestra accompaniment. On the title page of the manuscript Ruzitska himself specifies the component of the orchestra: *Adagio et Rondeau concertant pour le violoncelle avec accompagnement de 2 Violons, Flûte, 2 Haut bois et 2 Corns ad lib. Viola, e Basso* (Ruzitska n.d.) - a relatively small orchestra that reminds us of the orchestras of the classical era.

Interesting ingredients are as well that there is no score that would centralize all the voices, there are only available the orchestral and solo parts. The solo part is written in the so-called violin clef (G clef) that is a transposing clef this time, evoking the old fashion way of cello notation. (Schweitzer 1982).

Despite his title, Adagio and Rondo, the work is a one-part piece that has two sections separated by tempo marks: *Adagio and Rondeau Allegretto*, though at the end of the first, the composer marks that the second one should be *attacca*, and not interrupted at all. The Adagio part is noted in G major and in 4/4 that starts with a small introduction where the arpeggiated chords in the orchestra is followed by an improvisation like cello solo, under that the composer notes that *a piacere*. The first theme – like melody comes in in the ninth measure in the solo part. Descending sixteenth and eighth note lines alternate with triplet arpeggios for the following eight measures, keeping this part in the G major. The orchestra is reduced to the string section and have a very minimalist accompaniment being broken this only when announces the transition to other keys, as it happens in the sixteenth measure that leads us to E minor and in the twentieth one to A major. In the solo part we have step like motion ornamented with turns followed by sixteenth note passages that leads us to the A major that is the dominant of the dominant, so we would aspect the work to be continued in D major though the composer surprises us with a B flat major that would be considered as a leading chord since the Adagio section cadences in A major. In the solo part the cadence comes in by a flageolet arpeggio to the high register of the cello just following descending eight note triplet lines and A major scales in racket form. The *Rondeau Allegretto* section starts in measure thirty-six, and as well as the Adagio this one also has an introduction part to the actual Rondo part that, though we can interpret these five measures as transition too, this fact is confirmed by the double

bars that are put at the beginning and at the end of this couple measures. The first double bar introduces also a key change, our new key for the Rondo is F major. Our transitional part is written in a C7 chord that is real change after the A major cadence of the former section, the orchestra has a dotted rhythm that also highlights the introductory character of this small section, meantime the solo part continues the descending triplet lines arriving to the new theme in the fortieth measure. I must state from the beginning that this rondo form is not a usual one, since there is no a rondo theme in it that would alternate with contrasting thematic passages (Stefan Kostka 2008, 354) it could fit more into the sonata – rondo form, but not even in that. Our first (A) theme comes in the fortieth measure in F major as has been told before, a theme which has its roots in the improvisation like passage heard in the beginning of the Adagio. After being repeated in the orchestra the solo part introduces the second theme (B) in measure 56 that is already in C major, leading to the third one (C) in measure 66 in C major too that we could call maybe the rondo theme since this one appears more times during the piece, although most of the time just partly. Just as the first theme (A) this one also originates in the Adagio, namely it is the mirrored and simplified of the main melody starting in the ninth measure. This third theme has a quite challenging technical part too that cadences in C major in measure 92 when overtakes the orchestra the leading for a small time to give it back to the solo part in measure 97 a transitory passage that with a little chromaticism in its end recalls the first (A) theme in measure 107 again in F major. Between measures 114 and 123 takes place a tonally unstable orchestral intermezzo in which we can recognize motives from the Adagio section that continues in the solo part with technical passages arriving home to the third (C) theme in measure 144 this time in F major. The tonality already tells us that we are close to the end of the work, we need just a little coda like six measures that confirms that this is the end. Although as rondo form does not fit this work into the standards we have to look at also from the perspective of the concertante form and as such we find that the alternation between soloistic and orchestral sections, and the framed, circular form that we can consider as a sort of sonata form confirms that this is a concerto like cello piece, a concert piece.

Stylistically, the work could be identified somewhere between the classical and romantic idioms. The orchestration, clear harmonies, melodic turns, ornaments evocative of the classical era, and sudden tonality changes are indicative of the following period. We have to mention that there could be discovered the fingerprints of the Hungarian music too in the work, that places it in the nationalistic movement.

The technical demands are suitable to the intermediate cellist, and borrow many elements from other composers like Haydn, Kraft, or even Beethoven, in demonstrating the instrument's soloistic strengths.

3. Conclusions

G. Ruzitska's Adagio and Rondo Concertante for cello and orchestra could be located as a transitional work in style but one that possesses all the melodic elements and turns as well as cello technical solutions to make it worth to play it on stage.

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